

Intense Conversations: How To Handle Annoying People

Participant Guide

WV Department of Transportation
Division of Highways
Training and Development Section



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	2
Workshop Objectives	4
Worksheet: Express Yourself.....	5
Worksheet: Say What You Mean	6
Worksheet: How Do You Feel?	7
Worksheet: To Be or Not to Be	9
Cycle Breathing Activity	10
Worksheet: Is the Glass Half Full?.....	11
Action Plan.....	
Communicate with Power	19
Body Language.....	19
It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It	19
Role of Emotional Intelligence at Work.....	20
Creating a Powerful First Impression	20
Assessing a Situation.....	20
Being Zealous Without Being Offensive:	20
Self Management.....	20

*Whatever the mind can conceive and
believe, the mind can achieve.*

Dr. Napoleon Hill

Introduction

Welcome to the “Intense Conversations: Handling Annoying People” workshop.

How do you know that you need to have an intense conversation with someone who is annoying you one way or another?

Do you –

- Change the subject
- Hold back
- Tell little lies (and big ones)
- Find yourself being imprecise in your language
- Find yourself being uninteresting even to yourself?

“When you come out from behind yourself into the conversation and make it real, whatever happens from there will happen. It could go well or it could get a little bumpy, but at least you will have taken the plunge. You will have said at least one real thing today, one thing that was real for you. And something will have been set in motion, and you will have grown from that moment.” Susan Scott

Susan Scott came up with some principles for having intense conversations. How can having an intense conversation with someone make us more effective at work and at home? What will we achieve?

INTENSE CONVERSATIONS

Before Intense Conversations	After Intense Conversations
Focus on activities. On reasons on why it is not possible to reach individual or group goals. Stalled initiatives.	Focus on results. Deep-seated accountability. Initiatives executed.
Beating around the bush, dancing around the subject, skirting the issues. No one engages. Nothing changes.	Naming and addressing the issues truthfully and effectively. Impetus for change.
An “us” versus “them” or “me versus you” culture. Politics, turf wars, competition for resources and attentions.	High levels of alignment, collaboration, partnership at all levels throughout the organization.
Leaders overwhelmed by the complexity of their tasks. Everything is a priority.	The timely resolution of periodic leadership challenges. Clear priorities.
Leaders micromanaging instead of leading. No grassroots leadership development.	Improvement in leadership effectiveness, development of quality “bench” to fill future leadership positions.
Original thinking is happening elsewhere. Sleepwalking through the manual.	Shared enthusiasm for agility, continued learning and epiphanies; shared standard of performance.
A culture of terminal “niceness.” Avoiding or working around problem employees. Tolerating mediocrity.	Effectively confronting attitudinal, performance or behavioral issues. Enhanced employee capacity to serve as effective agents for strategic change.

Emotional Intelligence is defined as a set of competencies demonstrating the ability one has to recognize his or her behaviors, moods, and impulses, and to manage them best according to the situation.

Why do you think that we are talking about YOUR behaviors, moods, etc. if this workshop is about managing annoying peoples’ behaviors?

The reason is that, even with a lot of training and manipulation, you might be able to effect a change in the behavior of the other guy. However, more often than not, this is not the outcome. Usually, we can only control ourselves and our own behaviors and reactions. This workshop will help you with the tools you need to be emotionally intelligent in your workplace. **An employee with high emotional intelligence can manage his or her own impulses, communicate with others effectively, manage change well, solve problems, and use humor to build rapport in tense situations. These employees also have empathy, and remain optimistic even in the face of adversity.**

Workshop Objectives

This workshop is designed to help you in the following ways:

- Define and practice self-management, self-awareness, self-regulation, self-motivation, and empathy.
- Recognize, use and manage your emotions.
- Verbally communicate more effectively with others.
- Communicate with others in an effective non-verbal manner.
- Identify the benefits of emotional intelligence.
- Relate emotional intelligence to the workplace.
- Balance optimism and pessimism.
- Effectively impact others.

Worksheet: Express Yourself

Read through the following scenarios. Write your first response to each. Do not over-analyze the scenario or answer it with what 'sounds the best'. Give your honest feedback.

1. You are the team lead for a project at work and your boss yells at you because it was not completed by the required deadline. You:

2. You find out that several of your co-workers are talking about you behind your back to the boss. They are telling your boss that you are slacking on the job and that the quality of your work is poor. You:

3. One of the company's clients called and told your manager that you were very rude to him. You know the client spoke to a co-worker who sits next to you, not you. You:

Worksheet: Say What You Mean

Read through the scenarios and verbally respond using the specified emotion.

1. *You were recently offered a position within the company that pays more but also requires greater responsibility, responsibilities that you don't believe you can handle.*

Respond in a happy manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

Respond in an apprehensive manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

Respond in a confused manner: I am so grateful for this opportunity and look forward to joining the team.

2. *You just found out one of your weakest team members is leaving the company. You tell him:*

Respond in an angry manner: I am so sad to see you go.

Respond in an indifferent manner: I am so sad to see you go.

Respond in a worried manner: I am so sad to see you go.

3. *You have been put on a verbal warning due to your tardiness. You say:*

Respond in a sincere manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Respond in a defensive manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Respond in a carefree manner: I truly apologize for my tardiness. It will not happen again.

Worksheet: How Do You Feel?

Read the following scenarios and write down your first reaction. Then write a couple of alternatives to the way you would handle the situation.

1. You find out that someone has intentionally broken your car window.

Your natural reaction:

Alternative #1 to your reaction:

Alternative #2 to your reaction:

2. Your biggest client has decided to take its business elsewhere.

Your natural reaction:

Alternative #1 to your reaction:

Alternative #2 to your reaction:

3. A water main break is preventing you from getting into your home.

Your natural reaction:

Alternative #1 to your reaction:

Alternative #2 to your reaction:

4. Your favorite television show has been taken off the air.

Your natural reaction:

Alternative #1 to your reaction:

Alternative #2 to your reaction:

Worksheet: To Be or Not to Be

Read each scenario and create a solution of compromise.

1. For a job well done, John wants to take the team out for a steak lunch, while his co-manager, Amy wants to take the team out for seafood. How can they compromise?
2. Mike wants to introduce an internet-based training to the team, but Peter believes this will not effectively present the material, and therefore suggests they provide a face-to-face, classroom training. How they can compromise?
3. Elizabeth believes the quality team at the local site should perform quality reviews for only the work of the representatives at the local site. However, Patty says the quality team at that site should conduct quality checks for the representatives of the all regional sites. How can they compromise?

Cycle Breathing Activity

Have participants follow the directions as you give these instructions:

CYCLE BREATHING EXERCISE:

- **Close your eyes**
- **Breathe in slowly and deeply to the count of 4**
- **Hold breath 2 counts**
- **Exhale to the count of 4**
- **Hold 2 counts**
- **Wiggle your fingers and toes then slowly open your eyes**

Worksheet: Is the Glass Half Full?

Read through the following statements and verbally give a positive response to each statement.

1. The morale of the team is down.
2. We have to work overtime this weekend.
3. My quality level is 1 percentage point below the requirement.
4. The training class does not understand the material they are being taught.
5. This work environment is too fast-paced.
6. This department may be downsizing.
7. Several people got upset in today's meeting.
8. My computer is moving slowly.
9. We did not receive all of the reference material we need to complete the project.
10. The manager's instructions are not clear.

Module Six: The Seven Principles of Intense Conversations:

PRINCIPLE 1: Master the Courage to Interrogate Reality

What is ground truth? It is actually a military term, describing what's actually happening on the ground versus the official tactics. *Ground truth* is what you hear around water coolers, in bathrooms, in the parking lot, is rarely offered up for public consumption and rarely ever shows up when you need it the most. *Official truth* is available for general circulation and is viewed by most team members as "propaganda."

Activity: Describe the following truths as you perceive them:

Official truths in My Workplace:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Ground Truths in My Workplace:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Official Truths in My Life:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Ground Truths in My Life:

- _____
- _____
- _____

Debrief:

PRINCIPLE 2: Come Out From Behind Yourself into the Conversation and Make it Real

Activity: Intense Conversations I Need to Have: List person(s) you know that you need to have an intense conversation with but have put off for one reason or another. Then list the topic that you need to discuss with this person.

PERSON:

TOPIC:

PRINCIPLE 3: Be Here, Prepared To Be Nowhere Else

If you or someone else feels that a conversation is needed, it is. We may succeed in hearing every word yet miss the message altogether. You cannot be here, prepared to be nowhere else, when you are interrupted by beeps, buzzes, and bells. The conversation hasn't ended just because the *conversation* has ended; the conversation is ongoing.

PRINCIPLE 4: Tackle Your Toughest Challenge Today (Face the Bull)

Tips for the "confrontation"

- Take it personally – the phrases “Don’t take this personally” and “Don’t take yourself so seriously” are misguided suggestions. *Do* take it seriously; do take *yourself* seriously
 - Sometimes we put so many pillows around a message that the message gets lost altogether; we try to avoid inflicting pain – replace pillows with clear requests.
 - Come straight at the issue. Get right to the point. Delivering a difficult message clearly, cleanly, and succinctly is essential. Say it in 60 seconds.
 - If you know something must change, then you know that it is *you* who must change it.
 - When we spend a lifetime curbing our anger, our sadness, or our frustration for fear of offending others, in the process, we curb our joy.
-

Activity: Using one of the persons and the issue you have with that person from Principle 2, follow the instructions below to organize your conversation. The group referred to in the last entry is either your group of employees or your peers with whom you want to discuss your issues.

The Issue is: (Be concise. In one or two sentences, get to the heart of the problem. Is it a concern, challenge, opportunity, or recurring problem that is becoming more troublesome?)

It Is Significant Because:(What's at stake? How does this affect dollars, income, people, products, services, customers, family, timing, the future, or other relevant factors? What is the future impact if the issue is not resolved?)

My Ideal Outcome Is:(What specific results do I want?)

Relevant Background Information:(Summarize with bulleted points: How, when, why, and where did the issue start? Who are the key players? Which forces are at work? What is the issue's current status?)

What I Have Done Up To This Point:(What have I done so far? What options am I considering?)

What Help I Want From My Group Is:(What result do I want from my group? For example, alternative solutions, confidence regarding the right decision, identification of consequences, where to find more information, critique of the current plan.)

Activity: Next Steps

Think about the intense conversations that you chose earlier. Choose one. Your first step is to write down the date by which you will have had this conversation.

DATE:

Now choose one of these conversations and prepare your opening statement by writing down exactly what you will say, covering the following steps:

1. Name the issue.
2. Select a specific example that illustrates the behavior or situation you want to change.
3. Describe your emotions about the issue.
4. Clarify what is at stake.
5. Identify your contribution to this problem.
6. Indicate your wish to resolve the issue.
7. Invite the other person involved to respond.

Once you're satisfied with the final draft, practice your opening statement until you own the words – until the words come out straight, clean, and clear. Have that conversation with the person you wish to address by the date you indicated.

With courage and practice, your discomfort in confronting difficult but important issues will lessen over time. The goal is for you to become current with the important people in your life. No more frustration. No more recurring anger.

PRINCIPLE 5: Obey Your Instincts

Private Thoughts

What you think
Not visible/audible

Public Thoughts

What you say
Visible/audible

Examples:

“You’re crazy. We can’t do that.”

“Sure. No problem.”

“People are scared to death of you. There’s no way they will tell you the truth.”

“What does your staff think?”

Belief: Don’t show what you feel.

Behavior: The Corporate Nod

Learn to listen to your thoughts and express them – appropriately. We have to pay attention to and value the messages we’re receiving from ourselves. Essentially, think of your brain as split into left-hand, middle, and right-hand columns.

Private Thoughts

What you think and feel but don’t say

Neutral Zone

You are aware of what you think and feel without attachment

Public Thoughts

What you see and hear. What is shared and known

Assumptions and judgments. Your private view.

You don’t claim it’s right or special. It just is. And you want to share it to see if it brings insight to the conversation.

Has your left-hand column been a royal pain to you? Here are some examples:

“Why is she talking like this? This isn’t the real issue.”

“I’ve lost the thread of this conversation. I’m completely disoriented.”

“He says the plan’s on track, but I sense an undercurrent of fear.”

“He says everything is fine. I don’t think he believes that.”

These messages are valid. Why would we ignore them? If you continue to ignore them, you will stop getting them. Our instincts are there for a reason.

“The most valuable thing any of us can do is find a way to say the things that can’t be said.”

Bring some of your feeling and thoughts into that Neutral Zone and just notice that they’re there. They’re not right or wrong. They just exist. When you’re ready you can bring these thoughts into the public conversation. “While you were speaking I had a thought that I would like to check out with you...” This lets the other guy in on what you’ve been thinking and feeling. It doesn’t invite defensiveness because you have not interjected your thoughts as THE TRUTH.

You can also present your thoughts as a question, “Would you like to hear something I’m thinking right now?” Then, if he’s interested, share your thought. A careful conversation is a failed conversation.

PRINCIPLE 6: Take Responsibility for Your Emotional Wake (“There are people who take the heart out of you and there are people who put it back.” Elizabeth David)

An emotional wake is what you remember after I’m gone. What you feel. The aftermath, aftertaste, or afterglow. ***What kind of wake do you want to leave behind you?***

Some Loaded Statements examples:

- Sugary sweet words with a malevolent undertone
- Blaming – the MOTHER of all loads. “This whole thing is all your fault. It’s you, not me. You really screwed this thing up.”
- Name-calling, labeling – “You’re an insensitive narcissist.” “You’re a liar.” “You’re a failure.”
- Sarcasm; black humor – “Apparently your life goal is to live on the cutting edge of mediocrity.” “Seems you’ve hit bottom and have started to dig.”
- Attaching global weight to tip-of-the-iceberg stuff. “You don’t love me and never did.” “This ruins everything. We’re finished.”
- Threatening/intimidating – “Guess you don’t value your job.” “You do this one more time and...” “Look, I don’t want to pull rank, but...”
- Exaggerating – “You always do this.” “Never once have you...” “This is the hundredth time...”
- Pointing to someone else’s failure to communicate, assuming a position of superiority; the other person is clearly inferior. “You don’t get it.” “You can’t handle it.” “You aren’t making any sense at all.” “I can’t get through to you.”
- Saying “if I were you...”
- Gunnysacking – bringing up all of the old baggage.
- Assassinating someone in public – this is sneaky and cowardly. We’re trying to get away with it by pretending it’s funny. “Oh, yeah. She thinks she’s such hot stuff.”
- Asking “Why did you do that?” instead of “What were you trying to do?”
- Making blatantly negative facial expressions. If we’re angry, disgusted, or disappointed, it will leak out somewhere on our faces.
- Layering our interpretation on something the other guy has said or done, ascribing negative or false motives – “What you really mean is...” “What’s really going on here is...”
- Being unresponsive, refusing to speak – may be the cruelest load you can attach to your message. To others, it feels like a lack of caring, or a lack of validation.

Activity: Crafting Your Message

Write down the name of someone at work or home to whom you need to deliver a difficult message. Start to craft your message, taking care not to attach a load to it. Practice saying it out loud. Then go to the person and say it.

PRINCIPLE 7: Let Silence Do the Heavy Lifting

Intense conversations *require* silence. The more emotionally loaded the subject, the more silence is required. Here are some signs that silence is needed:

- Interrupting by talking over someone else
- Formulating your own response while someone is talking
- Responding quickly with little or no thought
- Attempting to be clever, competent, impressive, charming, etc.
- Jumping in with advice before an issue has been clarified
- Using silence or break in the conversation to create a distraction by changing topics
- Talking in circles, nothing new emerging
- Monopolizing the airspace

The real work is being done in the silence. It's the most powerful tool in our communication toolbox.

Dangerous Silence – the silence of non-participation, of passivity which says *I really don't care what you think or do*. There is a cold silence between people who are angry with each other. A hostile silence can be more damaging to a work relationship than a full disclosure.

Communicate with Power

1. **Stick to the point.** Powerful communication is not about saying as many things as you can in a given period of time. Rather, it is about sticking to what is relevant to the discussion, and getting your message across in the shortest -- - but most impact-laden --- way possible.
2. **Don't be too casual.** The use of paraphrasing, slang, street talk and bad grammar can detract from your credibility, especially if you're mingling with potential clients, employers and business partners.
3. **Emphasize key ideas.** Stress the highlights of your communication.
4. **Tailor-fit your communication to your audience.**
5. **Connect.** Power in communication is sometimes determined by the quality of your rapport with others.

Body Language

The following are some tips and techniques you can follow to be able to use body language effectively.

1. **Increase your awareness of your body language.**
Try to get more information about what you communicate non-verbally, so that you will know what to change and what to retain.
2. **Know how certain behaviors are typically interpreted.**
Interpreting body language can be very subjective. There are, however, typical interpretations to specific body language.
3. **Practice! Practice! Practice!**
Body language is a skill. Initially, using body language that is congruent with the message that we want to communicate will feel unnatural.

The following are some of the components of body language: Eye Contact, Facial Expression, Posture, Specific Movements, Physical Contact

It's Not What You Say, It's How You Say It

The following are aspects of "how we say things" that we should take note of:

1. **Tone of Voice:** Voice intonation refers to the use of changing pitch in order to convey a message.
2. **Stress and Emphasis:** Changing which words or syllables you put emphasis on can change its meaning. For example, consider the differences among these three statements below.
3. **Pace and Rhythm:** The speed of speech, as well as the appropriate use of pauses can change the meaning of words spoken, and affect the clarity and effectiveness of a communication.

Role of Emotional Intelligence at Work

Social Proficiencies

- Empathy – Being aware of others' feelings and exhibiting compassion.
- Intuition – An inner sense of the feelings of others'.
- Political Acumen – Ability to communicate, strong influence and leadership skills and conflict-resolution.

Personal Proficiencies

- Self-Awareness – Understanding one's own emotions. The ability to assess one's self as well as display confidence.
- Self-Regulation – Managing one's emotions. Maintaining trustworthiness and flexibility.
- Motivation - Being optimistic about situations. Having the drive to take initiative and commit until completion.

Creating a Powerful First Impression

- **Physical Appearance:** It is unfortunate but true that when you are in a face-to-face meeting, you are initially judged on your physical appearance. Always err on the side of caution and present yourself in a conservative light.
- **Body Language:** From posture to facial expressions, the message being conveyed can be completely different from the intended message. The first handshake should be firm enough to show you are confident, but not so firm that it cuts circulation to the other person's fingers. Be sure to include good eye contact while you are shaking hands.
- **Spoken Words:** Stay away from the slang you would use with friends or in other less formal situations. Also avoid using too much jargon or words not typically used in everyday language, as this may cause the listener to tune out what you are saying for the mere fact that they cannot understand you.

Assessing a Situation

1. LISTEN, NOT JUST TO WHAT IS BEING SAID, BUT ALSO TO WHAT IS NOT BEING SAID.
2. IDENTIFY NEEDS.
3. PRACTICE ETIQUETTE.

Being Zealous without being Offensive:

1. FOCUS ON WHAT IS IMPORTANT TO THE OTHER PERSON.
2. RESPECT BOUNDARIES.
3. MAKE REQUESTS, NOT DEMANDS.
4. NOTE NON-VERBAL BEHAVIOR.

Self Management

The following is a list of five key points to remember to help you master the art of self-management: **Be consistent. Stick to the plan. Be accountable. Educate yourself. Stay physically fit.**